

Celebration LINK

December 2001

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that was**



Abbot Basil Matthews OSB

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That was the year, that was

In these troubled times, it's important to have a clear sense of what a Christian is. There are many answers, from technical religious definitions to an identification of faith with the particular focus of various segments of the church, be it spiritual, theological or political. We, too, could be just another such group, promoting "community" as the answer.

But you have to start from somewhere. The beginning of the year found us having completed much work on the principles of our life, which were embodied in a commentary on the Community's Rule and reflected in issues of News from Celebration. Since then we have diversified into a multi-faceted approach, the Trust and Community working together.

At Aliquippa, the Community linked with the Church Army in the shape of the Stanley family to address evangelism in the town. A property has now been found in the main street, and Community members have participated in a course on evangelism. The chapel project has been given the go-ahead, which will be a powerful symbolic focus for worship, for the Community's identity and presence in the locality, and for the participation of friends from further afield.

Local church ministry has been the particular focus of Phil and Margaret Bradshaw in Britain - less threatening than a community presence! The aim is not to produce a "Celebration" church, but to engage with the real lives of ordinary Christians. It means "getting hands dirty", but also, through the teaching ministry, digging down into the roots of what people really believe. This year, lively debate and calls for copies of sermons reveal the effect of getting some air and moisture into the dry soil of faith.

As important as local ministry is, we see it as vital to maintain links and dialogue with our wider church friends. We try to use our publications to express something of the spiritual life emerging from our explorations of faith together. This year, CCCT has also used colour in the Link, to give a sense of the life behind the written word. The new web site now attracts 4000 hits a month. "Partners in Ministry", a new scheme (see next page), is designed to create an active network of friends old and new.

Finally, we seek your prayers for us all. Certain health problems have also been a factor this year. The future for people as well as ministry is also part of our ongoing concern.

Launching "Partners in Ministry"

In the spring of 2001 Maggie Durran, a former member of the Fisherfolk who has written a large amount of material for use in worship, decided to take a break. She went for a stay at the Community of Celebration at Aliquippa, her first revisit to community since she moved on a number of years ago.

What she experienced there reawakened many memories. The Community was in the throes of planning for its new chapel, something which had been a dream for 30 years but never possible in the various temporary locations it occupied since first arriving in Britain back in 1972.

Over the years, hundreds of people had lived for a time in the Community. For some, memories were at best ambivalent, the pain involved in departure outweighing much of the good. Yet for the majority, the good at its best was very good: an experience unrepeatably and never to be found in any other setting.

That experience, both the joy and the pain of it, was gathered up and offered to God in the community's unique form of worship. What Maggie saw was that, although members who had left could never turn back the clock, the Community's new chapel could symbolise for them something that would remain with them forever.

That 'something' she described as 'grace in the space'. Not everyone could or should live permanently in community, yet the taste of it had been experienced by all who had lived it. It was not a case of saying that only those who remained in the Community continued as faithful followers of the vision. Each person needed to be who they were and to follow God's leading. Grace was in the space - the worship space, that is: the one thing common to all was the offering of our lives to God in worship.

A permanent chapel was, for all those who had embraced the vocation to community, a symbol of this - and indeed for those too who had been inspired by it though never actually living in it. While the Community, *as community*, would not necessarily provide a unifying umbrella to encompass all

those who had lived it or aspired to live in it, the chapel could. It was a physical representation of the one thing that was common to all, the giving of our lives to God in worship.

From this insight flowed many practical ideas. The broad concept was a proposed scheme entitled "Partners in Ministry". Soundings would be taken from former members and close friends to find out if they would be interested in a form of association with Celebration which would involve the offering of time, money or gifts to the Community and its ministry. The commitment would not be entirely a one way street. It would involve the sharing of ideas and ministry gifts, even though the Community would have to take ultimate responsibility for whatever was done in its name.

For historical reasons, the launch of the scheme took place in the UK. This was where the Community had flourished in the days of big communities, and where it had had its biggest impact in the



Jeanne Hinton (left) with Chris and Ros Burch

church. Various individuals were contacted and the first meeting took place in London. For this gathering some 25 people were able to attend, while others unable to make the date signified their desire to be included in future meetings.

Those who met shared a common history, from the Church of the Redeemer in Houston to Fisherfolk ministry and membership of the Community of Celebration in various locations in Britain: Yeldall Manor, Cumbrae, Post Green, Bletchingley. What seemed important, however, was not a nostalgia for the past,



Dave Porter (left), a former member of the Fisherfolk and of the Community at Cumbrae, helps Bill Farra lead worship at the inaugural meeting.



Abbot Basil Matthews OSB, whose community was a great help to Celebration in the 1970s and who continues to be a source of strength and encouragement. Elmore Abbey is a regular place of pilgrimage for Celebrationites!

but the enduring sense of relationship today, transcending former community membership to include others who have supported us and walked with us since early years.

The initial meeting clearly "hit the spot". In addition to raising in excess of £1,000 for the chapel building project, there was considerable enthusiasm for the vision itself. The Community were encouraged to continue, making plans for a similar launch in the USA and inviting a group in the UK to begin planning for the opening of the chapel, scheduled for August 2002. There is also a proposal for the Community in Aliquippa to come to Britain in October - more about this in later issues of the Link.

Former members of the Community are now scattered all over the world. The Community's influence on church worship is also worldwide, continuing despite the development of music in worship in other streams of Christianity in the last 15 or 20 years. We have been greatly encouraged, since the inaugural meeting of "PIM", to discover how many of our friends around the world are excited to explore what this new venture could mean.



A meeting of CCCT Trustees

For many years, the Community of Celebration was known for its ministry of music in worship. While that continues from the Community's base in Aliquippa, recent attention in the UK has focused on whether there is a distinctive theology or a definable set of values that are peculiar to the Community.

A lot of work has been done to describe the principles of our life, and samples of this can be seen on the CCCT website. But the process is rather like unravelling a ball of string. The more we delve into it, the less specific we are inclined to be. We find ourselves thinking in the broadest terms about Christian life and belief, recognising insights from



Rev. Phil Bradshaw speaking at a conference

many different sources that contribute to our spiritual outlook today.

One example arose at a clergy conference which Phil Bradshaw was invited to lead in November. Phil used events in his own life to show that how we actually experience God does not always conform to a textbook. Other talks looked at the dualities which can lead Christians into dividing good from bad, judging others accordingly and assuming God has a similar way of seeing the world.

These kinds of themes were more concerned with how we think about faith generally in the modern world. We hope to explore this more in future.

Reflections on the World Trade Centre

Teacher, when shall these things be? (Luke 21.7)

I dare say just about every thing has been said that can be said about the World Trade Centre by now - although that won't prevent it being said over and over again. Christian responses often vary between apocalyptic and a warning to seek justice not revenge. But I was really struck recently by the uncanny parallel with Jesus' remarks about the Temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus' disciples are admiring the Temple, saying what an amazing building it is. Jesus says that one day the whole thing will be razed to the ground with not one stone left upon another. This of course happens some years later, but the real butt of Jesus' comment is not the building but the system which it represents, i.e. the Law. That system, says Jesus, won't stand.

People have always built buildings to embody ideas that have a powerful grip on the human psyche. The tower of Babel is another Biblical example. Being symbolic does not mean there is no substance to their influence. The collapse of the building is usually accompanied by the collapse of the system they represent.

The World Trade Centre was just such a building - a mighty

temple to global capitalism, an idea which has a massive hold on people's thinking today. One could imagine Jesus standing in front of it and saying exactly the same thing.

In his own time the system which had such a grip on hearts and minds was the Law, as the means by which our relationship with God and each other are determined. Its fundamental flaws preoccupied Paul and to some extent Peter (cf. his vision not to call anything unclean), but I think later Christians have often mistaken the significance of this.

It seems to me that the root of Jesus' rejection of the Law was not its Jewishness but law as such, the nature of law itself. Paul's remarks have to be seen in that light. Being based on law, Judaism was a closed system, and Christians were those who, though Jews, could not be contained by it. Paul's insights into that have often been taken as a specific critique of Judaism, with the result that the church has behaved like another closed system, merely governed by a different set of religious laws.

It makes a big difference, when Paul uses phrases like 'in Christ', whether he is referring to a closed society of believers or whether he is referring to the Spirit of Christ which is charac-

terised by the fact that it does not create closed societies - or indeed abide by any human distinctions based on law, including moral and religious ones.

This brings us back to the World Trade Centre. Global capitalism is another system based on law: the law of the market in this case, which benefits those who abide by it and disadvantages those who don't. I suspect Jesus would have said, that won't stand.

I am reminded of a musical play which the Community put on at the Edinburgh Festival fringe years ago. Based on the Monopoly game, the rules encouraged players to get as much as possible for themselves. The satanic umpire, Devv, was reduced to impotent rage when the Family shared their gains, thereby frustrating the rules.

The 'rule of law' is a mantra for today's politicians. It's taken as the foundation of human life, adhered to even by God himself. Jesus challenged that assumption, by his word and his life. His disciples merely wanted to know what the world was coming to - when would the Temple fall? Will that be our response, or will we have the spiritual resources to engage with Jesus' insight?

Phil Bradshaw

Celebration USA: PO Box 309, 809 Franklin Avenue, Aliquippa PA 15001, USA
Website: www.communityofcelebration.com
Email: mail@communityofcelebration.com

CCCT Website: www.ccct.co.uk
Email: celebration@ccct.co.uk

Registered office: 35 Cavendish Road, Redhill, Surrey RH1 4AL Tel. (01737) 778760